

Notes and Observations

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE HEATH FRITILLARY (*MELICTA ATHALIA* ROTT.) IN KENT. — I first encountered this butterfly in 1974, after moving to London from the Midlands. At the first opportunity, on the 12th July, I left work in Central London a bit early and sped to Blean Woods. Although I had no idea where to look it did not take long to find three sites: (1) A small clearing beside a road where scrub and brambles were beginning to encroach though there were one or two grassy areas where some *athalia* were seen. (2) An area where the regularly planted sweet chestnut bushes had grown to about 8 to 10ft., with narrow grassy walks in between. Here again there were a reasonable number. (3) Small areas of grass and a small field beside the main cinder road through West Blean Wood supporting a quite healthy population.

The second encounter in Kent was on the 9th July, 1978 when, with a walking party I had crossed the A2 near Dunkirk and had climbed a fence on the south side of the road when I saw a single *athalia* in a small clearing. However, by far the largest sighting was in 1980. On 20th June, I had business in Canterbury and finishing soon after lunch, decided to go and check on the latest situation. Sites (1) and (2) had completely grown up and could not even be identified, although I did find another road-side site similar to (2) but with more regeneration and with a fair sprinkling of Heath Fritillaries. I then took the same walk as (3) but only saw three individuals. I did note though, a very extensive area that had been clear felled which looked promising. It was already getting late so I decided to return over the week-end. Saturday the 21st, was dull and cool and Sunday was even worse with rain in London but the forecast was for some sun in eastern England. I therefore decided, as it was my birthday, to take a chance and hope for the best. Most of the journey was under black clouds and heavy rain, and I was beginning to think that I must be mad, but about 10 miles from Canterbury the end of the cloud was reached and I was in sunshine. I went straight to the area that had caught my eye and soon had the pleasure of having *athalia* flying all around me. The ground cover was no more than about a foot high with lots of cow-wheat. At almost any time one could see from 3 to 5 *athalia* at once and they were over a very extensive area; I would estimate a rough population of a few thousand. An adjoining area where the grass looked greener and with more bushes was devoid of cow-wheat and *athalia*. It was interesting to note how closely the butterflies were confined to the cow-wheat areas even within the same open space. I spent 2 to 3 hours in perfect weather watching this unforgettable spectacle, a most welcome birthday treat. I was pleased to note extensive coppicing elsewhere, so for some time at least, as long as this continues, this butterfly should be reasonably safe. — S. L. MEREDITH, 5, Rutlish Road, Merton Park, London SW19 3AL.